

Nat'l Security Council

FROM PAGE 1

on the substantive aspects of the idea. However, we can and do intend to comment on the process so far followed. Bluntly put, whatever thinking has gone behind the NSC idea has been behind closed doors. Nothing has been shared with the public, and that is where our biggest objection lies. Why a matter of such importance has been worked at in such a hidden manner? The authorities may argue, since nothing has been finalised, there is nothing to make public to seek their views on.

Well, the matter is just not that simple. Since the coming of the present caretaker government we have seen a few very positive developments in terms of ensuring transparency and accountability of the government. The re-constitution of the Election Commission, Anti-corruption Commission (it was really a rebirth), and the Public Service Commission, the just announced policy on women, the imminent formation of Human Rights Commission, and the current process of enacting the Right to Information Law. All these will greatly enhance good governance, empower citizens, assure them of justice and fair play, and give them new rights.

The main feature common to all of them is that they were all demand driven -- meaning there was demand from the public for such institutions, laws, and policies. In fact there is a long history of struggle of the people behind each of the above developments. In each of the aforementioned cases the government responded to a long-standing public demand. So the question is what is the demand base of NSC? Is there any public demand for it?

Well the answer can be that even when there is no public demand, the government on its own can think of ideas, policies, and institutions that can be good for the public. We agree. But then the public must be given a chance to understand what it is all about. The public must justify its rationale, its need, its justification, its cost, and most importantly how this organisation will serve public interest better. The key word is 'public interest'.

At this stage it is not our intention

Soaring prices

FROM PAGE 1

pipeline," he said. A high official of NBR said if the agencies concerned find it viable that reduction of duty will help reduce the price of edible oil, the government may consider it in future.

Meanwhile, the prices of edible oil reduced slightly at city markets yesterday and the retailers claimed that the supply has increased.

Soya bean oil was selling at Tk 130 per kg at retail markets on Saturday, breaking all records. The price went down to Tk 118 per kg yesterday.

Retailers said the wholesalers are now supplying as much soya bean oil as they demanded per day. Abdur Rahman, a retailer at Karwan Bazar, said they got adequate supply from the dealers.

"Earlier I sold around 200kg edible oil a day, but on Friday and Saturday we got a very small supply against our demands," he said.

3 ordinances

FROM PAGE 1

done fast when the advisory council forwards the drafts to it for vetting, the LGRD adviser said.

Once the ordinances are promulgated, the Election Commission (EC) can declare schedules of the local government elections, headed.

Asked if the government is hurrying for the local government elections, the adviser said that this is not a matter of hurry as there are court orders for holding these elections within six months after their terms end. The time has expired in some cases, Anwarul Iqbal noted.

The adviser reiterated that he did not say that elections in 100 upazila parishads would be held in May and observed that there are upazila parishads, but no elected representatives at present.

Anwarul Iqbal said that voter listing of 80 upazilas has been completed and the EC may hold elections in those upazila parishads after city corporation elections.

The adviser observed that the local government institutions have so far been centrally controlled, but the ordinances are promulgated, such controls from the ministries will be removed to a great extent. The role of members of parliament as advisers to the upazila parishads has been abolished in the finalised amendment to the Upazila Parishad Act, he said, adding that the sources of income of the local government bodies were also increased.

"Administrative skills" that were written as qualifications of the local government commission members in the act have been replaced by "experienced in local government", meaning that it was not mandatory to have administrative skills, but they have to have experience in local government affairs, the adviser said.

Officials from the ministries of LGRD, home, law were present at the meeting.

tion to question whether an NSC will be a good or bad thing for the country. Nor do we want to attribute any motive to those who have pushed the idea to come as far as it did. What we now categorically demand is that the debate should be brought to the public domain. There will be tremendous benefit in doing so. First, by knowing about it in details, the public in general and experts in the public domain can make significant contributions to the ideas now being discussed in forming an NSC. Such ideas can greatly improve what is being proposed. By involving the public at an early stage, their ownership can be far better guaranteed than bringing them in at a point far advanced. That will only alienate them.

Because the NSC process has so far been shrouded in mystery, the public domain is filled with all sorts of unhealthy and unhelpful rumours, speculations and more damagingly, suspicions. When there is an absence of information, the space is automatically filled up by rumours, misinformation, and unkind interpretations. Given the fact that we have been ill served by our leaders in the past, especially by those who have extra-constitutional origin, suspicion is natural and rejection is almost automatic. The present government must be aware of it, and be extremely sensitive to it.

Permit us to conclude with some reality check. When government do things people want, they last. Even unrepresentative governments like the present one will be long remembered for their anti-corruption drive, the electoral reforms, the ID cards, and the voter list (assuming that no major flaw will be discovered), the Human Rights Commission (which needs some changes), the policy on women and the Right to Information Act (to be enacted soon). Nothing has ever been durable that has been forced down the throat of our people. Many institutions and laws were enacted but did not stand the test of time simply because the people were not taken into confidence while formulating them, and were not involved in implementing them.

Dr Kamal

FROM PAGE 16

writ jurisdiction cannot act as an appellate forum for deciding a question that involves interpretation of party constitution on the internal affairs of a political party. Secondly, he contended, it was also settled that the High Court in exercise of its power under writ jurisdiction does not embark on resolution of political question, having regard to the lack of judicially discoverable and manageable standards for resolving such a question.

Thirdly, it was settled that the summary procedure of writ jurisdiction was not appropriate for adjudication of issues involving disputed question of fact, which requires consideration of evidence and contested factual issues, he argued.

Dr Kamal submitted that the affidavits filed by the respondents found material facts disputed. Under the circumstances, the court, to adjudicate on these, will need to hold an investigation on the basis of evidence, which it cannot do in the writ jurisdiction. He further argued that the issue question involving internal proceedings of a political party could be resolved by those involved in this dispute, or by an appropriate court based on evidence.

He told the court that the Election Commission (EC) had already complied with the High Court's interim order canceling the scheduled November 22 meeting with Maj (ret) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed on electoral reforms. "Thus the writ petitioner had already obtained full relief."

Since the meeting for the November 22 dialogue had been cancelled, it would be a futile exercise to pass any declaration that the November 5 EC letter of invitation for dialogue is of no legal effect, Dr Kamal said.

Earlier, TH Khan, the counsel for BNP chairperson, opposing Dr Kamal Hossain, submitted that it is very risky to define for the jurists and judges what is pure political question of disputed fact. There is no such element in the writ petition, he said, so it can come under judicial review.

"Our case is very simple and clear...we have challenged the validity of the decision of the Election Commission and its action that caused political leadership dispute in BNP," Khan told the court.

"We have come here with a complaint that the EC has done wrong," he went on, adding that the High Court in exercise of its writ jurisdiction can resolve the issue as it has wide ambit of jurisdiction.

Khan said his client, although a political party chief, has not come here seeking remedy for solving any political issue.

The hearing resumes today.

Niko official's

FROM PAGE 16

Zia and four others.

However, details of the statement were not available immediately. Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Waliul Islam recorded the statement of the witness after Assistant Director of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) SM Sahidur Rahman, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, brought him before the court.

Earlier on December 30 last year, Khaleda was shown arrested in the case following a petition submitted by the IO of the case. Detained former law minister Moudud Ahmed, former state minister for energy AKM Mosharrar Hossain were also shown arrested in the case the same day.

Mahbubul Alam, an assistant director of the ACC, filed the case on December 9 with Tejgaon Police Station against Khaleda Zia and four others.

The case statement said Khaleda Zia, despite being the custodian of the country's wealth as a prime minister, criminally awarded Niko the opportunity to extract Tk 10,000 crore worth of gas through violating her oath and abuse of power.

Khaleda was arrested on September 2 last year following the filing of the Gato graft case against her.

The ACC also accused former energy secretary Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, former acting energy secretary Khandaker Shahidul Islam, and Vice-president (South Asia) of Niko Research Bangladesh Ltd Kashem Sharif in the case.

Former Dhaka Club president Selim Bhuiyan was earlier arrested in connection with the case. On January 15 he gave a confessional statement saying that all the dealings between the Bangladesh government and the Canadian energy company Niko were made through him.

Based on Selim's confessional statement, detained controversial businessman Giasuddin Al Mamun was shown arrested in the case and the ACC was permitted to interrogate him at jail gate.

BRAC bank heist

FROM PAGE 16

cohort Yunus Ali on March 5 night at Kadamtali village in Keraniganj. Tk 6 lakh was seized during the swoop, DB inspector AKM Nasirullah told The Daily Star yesterday.

The following day [March 6] the two were taken to a court and placed on six-day remand.

Six days after their arrests, Shukkur, who hails from Chittagong, and Yunus were paraded before the journalists at the DB office yesterday afternoon.

"In interrogations, they admitted their role and narrated how they pulled off the heist," said Nasirullah, also the investigation officer (IO) in the case filed for the robbery that took place at the bank's Sukerabadi branch sometime between January 3 and 7.

Shukkur and his gang pierced through the bank's roof and made off with ornaments and other valuables worth several crore taka from 60 lockers.

Talking to reporters, he said, "Me and my men had visited the bank on a number of occasions. We had rented rooms at Hotel Nidmahal located just above it."

"After we were done with stealing from the lockers, we tried to leave the country but failed due to betrayal of the travelling agency that we had paid a huge sum."

Nasirullah said, "The two other masterminds are Masuk and Hanif." In drives across the country, the DB teams have recovered around 500 tolas of gold, five pieces of diamond, 200 tolas of silver ornaments, and Tk 8 lakh in cash.

RPGCL officials

FROM PAGE 1

The accused RPGCL officials are present Managing Director (MD) Abdul Wadud, present Director (finance) M Golam Mostafa, former managing directors ABM Fazle Elahi and Major (ret) Raihanul Abedin, former acting MD and general manager (GM) Ekramul Huq Chowdhury and ex-GM AKM Rezaul Karim.

The other two accused in the case are Mohammad Ali, MD of Trident Agency, and Mahbubur Rahman, proprietor of Rahman Service Station.

In the other case, the ACC accused six RPGCL officials -- Elahi, Abedin, Wadud, Ekram, Karim and manager Nawshad Azam -- of mis-appropriating over Tk 9.75 crore from 1993 through 2004.

9 DB men

FROM PAGE 1

Afan Ullah, Ifan Hossain, Abdul Hakim and Bazlur Rahman, constables Abdul Hashem and Ali Haider, and Nilkamal UP Chairman Iqbal Hossain Likhon.

In the complaint, Masum's father Khandaker Abul Khair said UP Chairman Likhon, with whom he had an enmity, in collusion with some DB men picked up his son from Mehedi Community Centre at Mohammadpur in the capital at about 8:00pm on July 8, 2005.

The following day Khair and his family, who live in a house on Sher Shah Shuri road in Mohammadpur, came to know from the news on private TV channel ATN Bangla that the dead body of a youth was lying at the Dhaka Medical College Morgue. Since he had been looking for Masum since his disappearance and went to the morgue and found his body.

Later, Khair filed a petition case against the same accused with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court on August 18, 2005.

After the hearing of the case, the court directed the Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner to take legal action against the accused upon investigating the matter.

Hasina should

FROM PAGE 1

blasts, have requested the jail

authorities to send her to their hospital in Florida without delay.

In a letter, they suggested that software of the hearing aids installed in her ears should have immediate adjustments, said a personal physician of the ailing former prime minister.

Meanwhile, the AL Presidium yesterday called on the government to release its chief immediately and with no strings attached. It also decided to write to the chief adviser in a day or two, urging him to arrange for her to get treatment in the US.

Under supervision of Dr Millat, the AL president was taken to the hospital at 8:46am. She has been allotted a cabin on the 14th floor. Tight security measures were in place in and around the private medical facility on Panthapath.

Earlier on Monday, she agreed to be hospitalised as proposed by the caretaker government.

Talking to The Daily Star in the afternoon, medicine specialist Dr Abdullah said they are unanimous in their opinion that she must be sent to the US hospital where she had her ear devices installed and updated from time to time. "Otherwise, we are afraid she might go permanently deaf."

However, her other medical conditions can be treated here, he added.

"We have already sent our recommendations to the jail authorities in writing," said Dr Abdullah.

Prof Tahir, vice-chancellor of Bangladesh University Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), told reporters that the ENT specialists who have examined Hasina think it would not be wise even to "touch her damaged ears". She should be treated at the medical centre where she got treatment earlier.

Deputy Inspector General (prisons) Major Shamsul Haider Siddiqui told The Daily Star at 8:00pm that the recommendations did not yet reach them. "Let us receive the recommendations first and only then we will decide on the matter."

However, Suraiya Bulbul, the doctor assigned to monitor the health condition of Hasina at the sub-jail at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex, has received a letter from one of her personal physicians, he added.

Meanwhile, some highly placed sources told The Daily Star that her hospitalisation is in fact part of the government plan to send her abroad within several days.

Besides ear problems, she has allergy and high blood pressure. Sources said four other doctors -- Dr Shailla Khatun and Dr Baren Chakrabarty and two others nomi-

Iftekhar

FROM PAGE 1

Dhaka suggested that the vast material resources of the Islamic countries, including the huge sovereign wealth surpluses, could be pressed into this role and service.

"The time has surely come to move from talk to action, from vague deliberations to implementation with practical measures for the benefit of our people," he told the ICFM meet ahead of the OIC summit, beginning in Dakar tomorrow.

As chairman of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Bangladesh tabled a proposal for a special OIC programme for the LDCs.

The huge manpower resources of the Islamic countries should be utilised to maximise their contribution and welfare, said Iftekhar while mooting the proposal.

He mentioned the political crises that confront the Islamic world and said, "We cannot and will not succeed until we learn to speak in one voice."

The foreign adviser is also having a series of bilateral meetings in Dakar with his other counterparts, says a message from the Senegalese capital.

Zandal

FROM PAGE 16

nection with the grenade attack, is under trial at the Sylhet Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal while the arms and explosives case is under trial at the Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court.

Depositions of 53 prosecution witnesses have already been recorded in the murder case while six gave depositions in the second case.

The district judge of Sylhet on July 12 last year acquitted 20 of the accused people as their names were dropped from the charge sheet. They were arrested from the shrine area after the attack.

Three people were killed and Bangladesh-born British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury along with 70 others were hurt in the grenade attack that took place after the Juma prayers on May 21, 2004 at Hajrat Shahjalal (RA) in Sylhet.

Special Branch of Police (SB) Assistant Sub-inspector Kamal Uddin, Habibur Rahman Habib and college student Zobayer Ahmed Rubel were killed in the attack.

nated by the government--could soon join the seven to examine her thoroughly.

In three weeks, this is the second time she is at the Square Hospital. On February 21, after a couple of hours' stay for check-ups there she was taken back to the makeshift jail.

Briefing the newsmen in front of the hospital, DIG Prisons said they learnt on Monday night that the AL chief would be admitted to hospital. "We preferred Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital or Apollo. But she preferred Square," he said.

They would take further steps following up the doctors' suggestions after all necessary examinations.

AL PRESIDIUM The Presidium, the party's highest policy-making body, at a meeting chaired by acting president Zillur Rahman demanded that the government send their leader to the US for treatment.

It also discussed overall political situation and price hikes of essentials.

Briefing the journalists, AL acting general secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam said the Presidium observed that the caretaker government's only duty is to have the national election held in a free and fair manner.

It asked the military-backed administration to lift the state of emergency and ban on political activities.

Presidium members Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Motia Chowdhury, Kazi Zafullah and Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser were present at the meeting that also called for effective measures to contain price spiral.

Sri Lanka

FROM PAGE 16

meetings are scheduled to be held from July 27 to August 3. "Colombo city hotels have been identified to accommodate around 1200 delegates and media personnel associated with the event," an official statement said.

The shifting of the venue from Kandy to Colombo has been done due to inadequate infrastructure facilities to accommodate the seven heads of state, their respective delegations and the large international and regional media contingent, it said.

However, picturesque Kandy, located about 80 kms northeast of Colombo, is being retained as the venue for events associated with the summit, the statement said.

CA off to Dakar

FROM PAGE 16

will specially focus on the implementation of its 10-Year Programme of Action and adoption of the revised OIC Charter. It will have two brainstorming sessions on economic cooperation among member-states, especially African nations, and knowledge sharing among the member-states.

Accompanying activities to the summit meet include the first NGO and civil-society conference by the OIC and another conference on science and technology.

Oil prices

FROM PAGE 16

Oil prices are also heading higher because investors are seeking a safe place for their cash amid fears of rising inflation and a US recession, analysts said.

"Crude futures held firm (on Tuesday), extending yesterday's rally and reaching fresh record highs in both London and New York, still underpinned by strong demand for dollar-denominated commodities and with oil seen as a good hedge against inflation," said Sudden analyst Andrew Kryuchenkov.

"Inflation fears are still very strong, outweighing prospects of a slower growth in the US and lower seasonal demand for oil in the second quarter."

At the same time, the oil market is under intense pressure from stretched supplies and demand from the United States -- the world's biggest energy consuming nation -- and Asian powerhouses China and India.

In recent days and weeks, oil prices have blazed a record-breaking trail, smashing through 107 and 108 dollars in New York on Monday alone.

"Currently concerns over a weakening US economy are leading investors to find a haven in commodities as the dollar weakens on expectations of further cuts in US interest rates," energy consultancy John Hall Associates wrote in a note to clients.

"This is outweighing the impact of fundamentals" of supply and demand, they added.

In Paris on Tuesday, meanwhile, the International Energy Agency warned that high prices were here to stay.

"We are in an era of higher oil prices," the IEA said in a monthly market report.

The IEA trimmed its monthly estimate for world oil demand this year to 87.5 million barrels per day "with downward pressures from weaker economic growth in the OECD mostly offset by stronger former Soviet Union (FSU) projections."

Myanmar rejects

FROM PAGE 1

The energy shortage would become acute after 2009 if new gas

finds are not made, Tamim said. "Now our industries are expanding quickly and we have huge investments in gas-based power plants. We're facing a growing energy crisis," Tamim said.

Bangladesh has daily demand for 1,800 million cubic feet of gas but the country's 23 gas fields can provide only 1,700 million cubic feet as lack of investment in new exploration since late 1990s has outstripped supply.

"Since 1999, there was hardly any investment in new gas discoveries as the companies did not see any market for gas here," Tamim said.

The southeastern city of Chittagong is home to the country's largest gas-guzzling industries such as fertiliser and steel and is running short of gas.

"I've told the Chittagong-based companies not to hope too much. Some big companies which want to expand are now suffering and the situation may continue for a while," Tamim said.

In an effort to step up future supply, the country's military-backed government has already invited bids from foreign oil companies to explore for gas and oil in the hydrocarbon-rich Bay of Bengal.

In addition, companies such as Chevron, Total, Cairn Energy and Bangladesh's state-owned Bapex have started exploring for oil in their onshore and offshore blocks, Tamim added.

Bangladesh has proven recoverable gas reserves of 14 trillion cubic feet according to the latest survey, the deputy minister said.

The reserves are expected to last until 2022 if no new discovery is made, he said.

Second ODI

FROM PAGE 16

and slow while the visitors are also likely to include two spinners in Johan Botha and Paul Harris.

But the Tigers' main headache lies in their batting and they have to put up at least a decent total on the board first if they want to put an end to their disappointing performance in the series.

Mohammad Ashrafur's boys made a meek surrender in Chittagong in the first match on March 9 mainly because of their poor batting as they were bundled out for 178 which the touring side overtook comfortably thanks to a masterly hundred by captain Graeme Smith.

The match will start at 9:30am with NEO Sports and state-run Bangladesh Television beaming the live coverage.

TEAMS BANGLADESH: Mohammad Ashrafur (captain), Tamim Iqbal, Shahriar Nafees, Nazimuddin, Shakib Al Hasan, Rokibul Hassan, Dhiman Ghosh (wicketkeeper), Abdur Razzak, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Mosharrar Hossain and Syed Rassel.

SOUTH AFRICA (from): Graeme Smith (captain), Herschelle Gibbs, Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers (wicketkeeper), Jean-Paul Duminy, Albie Morkel, Johan Botha, Charl Langeveldt, Paul Harris, Morne Morkel, Andre Nel, Dale Steyn, Alviro Petersen.

HBM Iqbal

FROM PAGE 16

parliament complex. All the convicts are absconding and were tried in absentia.

Judge Firoz in his judgment also directed the government to confiscate their wealth worth Tk 14.56 crore, which is disproportionate to the known sources of income of Iqbal, also a businessman.

Iqbal has been convicted for concealing his wealth worth over Tk 10 crore in the wealth statement submitted to the ACC and for accumulating wealth worth over Tk 2 crore beyond his known source of income.

His two sons were found guilty for accumulating wealth worth over Tk 13 lakh and his daughter amassed wealth worth over Tk 1 crore through illegal means.

The case was filed against Iqbal on charges of amassing huge wealth through illegal means and concealing information in the wealth statement submitted to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

ACC Assistant Director Mohammad Ibrahim filed the case against Iqbal, his wife, two sons and a daughter with Gulshan police on June 25.

According to the case statement, Iqbal concealed information about an illegally acquired Tk 5.3 crore house on Gulshan Avenue which he registered in his wife's name, and Tk 5 crore fixed deposit.

On February 18 last year, the ACC had issued notice to 50 graft suspects, including Iqbal, asking them to submit their wealth statements.

Of the 50, those who were in jail were asked to submit their wealth statement through prisons authorities or their representatives. The rest were directed to submit it to ACC headquarters in person.

Iqbal was not in jail but he submitted his statement through his representatives obtaining a High Court order.

Right to information

FROM PAGE 1

representative from Manusher

Jonno Foundation (MJF) in it. The draft has 27 articles including one for formation of an information commission which will be able to fine up to Tk 25,000 and recommend punishments as per the service rules if any quarter fails to provide information to citizens in a stipulated time.

Stressing the need for the law, Dr Kamal Hossain suggested inclusion of people from all strata for having realistic and meaningful discussions in a bid to formulate an accurate law.

"Everyone at the grassroots level should have access to information as it is a fundamental right," he stressed.

Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said political parties should be included in the discussions as they are also the stakeholders who will have to pass the ordinance in the next parliament.

Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star, also strongly stressed